

Marietta (House, Ice House & Chapel)
Cellington, Maryland

BUENA VISTA

Princess of George Co.

HABS No. MD-619

HABS

MD

17. BUEVI

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W. Washington, D.C.

MARIETTA
(Benjamin Duvall House)
5626 Bell Station Road
Glenn Dale
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-619

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Addendum To:
MARIETTA
(Benjamin Duvall House)
5626 Bell Station Road
Buena Vista
Prince George's County
Maryland

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MARIETTA
(Benjamin Duvall House)

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Addendum To:
MARIETTA
(Benjamin Duvall House)
5626 Bell Station Road
Buena Vista vicinity

Location: 5626 Bell Station Road, Glenn Dale, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Present Use: Marietta is currently being used as a house museum. The modern wing is being used partly as a caretaker residence and partly as offices and library for the Prince George's County Historical Society.

Significance: Marietta is one of the finest surviving examples of a late Federal-style brick plantation house found in Prince George's County. It is different from most of the plantation houses of its era in the county in that it is moderate in size, taking the form of an I-house, and is more restrained in its detailing. Marietta is also of significance as the home of lawyer Gabriel Duvall who served as a Justice of the Supreme Court, and other important government positions. His law office, also of interest, still sits on the property.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: The main block of Marietta was completed in 1816, as evidenced by a brick just west of the door which reads, "IL 1816". The two-story rear wing was added in the 1830s. Finally, the modern, L-shaped wing at the west was added ca. 1950.

2. Original and subsequent owners: Gabriel Duvall built his home on the large tract (accumulated over a number of years) adjoining the plantation on which he had been

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born. Marietta was his primary dwelling place from its completion in 1816 to his death on March 6, 1844. His wife and only child (Edmund Bryce Duvall) having predeceased him, Marietta was inherited by his two grandsons, whom he had been left to raise in 1832. Marietta remained in the Duvall family until 1910 when it was sold to Mary B. Bowie. Upon her death, it was bequeathed to her nephew, Hunter M. Bennett in 1931. Ten years later he sold Marietta to William and Mary-Eula Blair who retained possession until 1945 when it was sold to Paul and Margaret Scherer. In order that Marietta be preserved, the Scherers conveyed it along with twenty-five acres to the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission in 1968. They retained a life tenancy which they gave up in 1978.

3. Builder: The only clue to the craftsman who built Marietta for Gabriel Duvall is the initials "I.L." in the dated brick at the front facade.

4. Original plans and construction: The original section of the house, the current main block, is an I-house, consisting of a center hall with a single room to either side.

5. Alterations and additions: Marietta has two major additions. The first, made ca. 1830, is a two-story addition which forms a T onto the rear of the main block. It consists of a stairhall and one room, up and down, currently with a bath and/or closets. The next major addition was made ca. 1950 to the west side of the house. It is a single-story (over a high basement), L-shaped addition. It includes a modern kitchen and a garage underneath.

B. Historical Context:

The Duvall family had been living in Prince George's County for many years when Gabriel Duvall was born on December 6, 1752. His great-grandfather, Mareen Duvall, a French Huguenot, had first settled here in the 1650s. He accumulated a great deal of land in both Prince George's and Anne Arundel Counties which was passed to his son Benjamin, and then to Benjamin's son, also named Benjamin. A smaller tract eventually came into the possession of Benjamin (II)'s son, Gabriel.

Although Gabriel Duvall grew up on his father's Prince George's County farm, he left in 1771 for Annapolis, not

to return for approximately forty years. Duvall went to Annapolis to begin a long and distinguished career which would lead him to a seat on the Supreme Court of the United States where he served for twenty-three years before retiring. His first position in Annapolis was that of Clerk of the General Court, and eventually, a clerk of the House of Delegates. He began practicing law in 1778. He served in a number of public positions including prosecutor in the Mayor's Court in Annapolis, a member of the Governors Council, and in the House of Delegates.

He was married for the first time in 1787 to Mary Bryce, daughter of Captain Robert Bryce of Annapolis. She unfortunately passed away just two months after the birth of their first child, Edward Bryce Duvall, in 1790. The child was sent to live with his grandfather, Benjamin Duvall in Prince George's County while Gabriel remained in Annapolis to pursue his career. He later was appointed as a Maryland representative to the Third United States Congress and was present when the House convened its second session in Philadelphia in November of 1794.

He remarried in 1795 to Jane (Jenny) Gibbon. Gabriel continued to serve as a Congressional representative until December of 1795 when he was elected as Judge of the Maryland Supreme Court. In 1802 he was appointed by President Thomas Jefferson as Comptroller of the U.S. Treasury, a reward for Duvall's assistance in his campaign for presidency. He and his wife, Jenny, then moved to Washington. In 1811, Gabriel was appointed by President Madison to the Supreme Court of the United States, where he served for the remainder of his career.

It was evidently about this time that Gabriel Duvall began the construction of Marietta, on property he had acquired from his father. By the mid-1810s he and his wife were residing at Marietta. He had also constructed a small law office on the property, which he must have used when not in Washington, sitting court. His son and only child, Edward, also maintained a residence on the property. A series of tragedies struck Gabriel Duvall beginning in 1831 with the death of his son, Edward. Edward's widow died in 1832, leaving their two sons in the custody of their grandfather. Gabriel added the rear wing in 1833, probably to accommodate his grandsons. Then, in 1834, Jenny died. The next year he retired to operating his plantation and caring for his grandsons.

He died at Marietta on March 6, 1844.

Marietta remained in the Duvall family for many more years. It was finally sold out of the family in 1910 when it became the possession of Mary B. Bowie. In 1945 Marietta was purchased by Paul and Margaret Scherer. The house had suffered neglect, and the Scherers restored the house and added the large side wing. To insure Marietta's preservation, the Scherers conveyed the house and twenty-five acres to the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1968, maintaining a life tenancy which they later relinquished in 1978. The house currently serves as a house museum, with a caretaker, and site of the Prince George's County Historical Society.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Marietta is a fine Federal-style plantation house. Unlike most brick plantation houses of Prince George's County which were built in a Georgian plan, Marietta took the form of an I-house, a center stairhall flanked with parlors. Marietta is understated in its detailing which includes flat-arched keystone lintels and a dentilled brick cornice. Its interior trim, elegant stairway, federal mantels and stepped architrave door and window moldings, are also typical of the period.

2. Condition of fabric: Marietta appears to be in good, well maintained condition. However, the rear wing is of inferior brick which has "exploded" (due to freezing of absorbed moisture), with much of the outer surface chipping off.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block is a two-and-a-half story, rectangular building with a dormered gable roof. Forming a T-shape to the rear is a two-story rectangular ell, also with a gable roof. At the west side is an L-shaped modern wing of one-story on a high basement. There is a large deck to the rear of the main block, between the ell and the modern addition.

2. Foundations: The foundations of the main block and rear ell are very low and are of rubble stone.

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3. Walls: The south front wall of the main block is brick laid in Flemish bond, demarcated by a change in the bonding, from a Flemish bond wall to a American bond foundation. The side and rear walls of the main block are in American bond (5:1). In the rear wing, the east side is in Flemish bond and the north rear and west side are in American Bond (5:1). The foundation in the rear ell, which is higher due to the slope of the land, is demarcated by a water table, in American bond. The modern wing is brick in a running bond pattern, with a wide, concrete water table at the north rear.

4. Structural system, framing: Marietta is of load bearing brick construction.

5. Porches, stoops: At the front entry is a stoop with fieldstone-covered steps which flare out towards the bottom, with an iron balustrade. However, there was previously an entry portico with benches built-in to either side (as seen in the 1936 HABS photograph). A faint ghost of this portico is still visible. A large, modern wooden deck has been added to the rear, running between the old wing and the new wing.

6. Chimneys: Marietta has three brick, interior, gable-end chimneys. There is one at either end of the main block and one to the rear of the older wing.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entry is to the center of the front facade. Above is a semi-circular light with an arched brick lintel with keystone. The lintel extends past the doorway slightly, and there is an architrave molding between the top of the door and the light, and lintel above. The heavy wooden door has six flush panels (cross-and-open bible). There is an entry to the rear, to the inside of the old wing. There is a sliding glass door entry to the rear of the modern wing and doors at the basement level, to the rear (one being a garage).

b. Windows: The windows on the front facade of the main block all have flat-arched stone lintels and stone sills, and are long and narrow. On the first story there are nine-over-nine-light double-hung sash windows, and on the second story are nine-over-six-light double-hung sash windows. There are

also four basement windows at the front. All are three-light casement windows with flat-arched brick lintels and stone sills. There are no windows at the sides of the main block in the first and second stories. In the top, half-story there is a four-over-four-light double-hung sash window with a brick lintel and stone sill, to either side of the interior chimney block. The rear of the main block has the same windows as the front but with flat-arched brick lintels instead of stone.

The older wing has a simplified version of the windows of the front of the main block. These are flat-arched stone lintels but without keystones, and stone sills. The windows are wider but with the same pattern of lights. There are basement windows with the same treatment as the main block.

The modern wing mimics the old house in that it has the same number of lights, but without ornamental surrounds.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block has a steep-pitched side-gabled roof with a slight parapet in the gable ends. The rear wing is the same but the pitch of the roof is low. Both are covered with wooden shingles. The modern section has cross-gable roofs covered with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a dentilled brick cornice in the main block and older rear wing.

c. Dormers: There are two dormers at the front of the main block and one to the rear. The dormers are gabled and have six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: Marietta's main block has a center stairhall with a parlor to the east side and a dining room to the west side. From the west side of the dining room is a doorway into the modern wing. The stairway runs along the west wall of the hall. Across from the front entry, to the rear of

the stairhall are a few steps down into the rear wing. To the immediate east is an open stairway running up to the second story and down to the basement. To the west is a half-bath and a short hall to an outside entry. Straight back to the rear is a large room.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same pattern as the first with large bed chambers over the parlor and dining rooms, and a bath in the front over the stairhall. The second floor of the rear wing is entered from the landing of the stairway. There is a large room to the rear with storage closets etc. to the front. The back stair enters directly into the back room of the wing.

c. Third floor: There is a half-story over the main block. The stairway comes up to the center with one room to either side.

2. Stairways: The main stairway, along the west wall of the center hall, is an open-well, two-flight stairway which rises up to the third floor. There is a landing at the level of the second floor of the rear wing, where there are three steps leading into the wing. The main stair then heads up in the opposite direction to the second floor. It is an open-string stair with low-rise steps and simple brackets in the step ends. There is an elegant, slim, slightly tapering newel post with the handrail coming down to form the flat rounded newel cap. There are plain balusters, two per step. The wall along the stairway on the first floor is paneled. There is a closet under the stair (formerly the stairway to the basement). The back stair is located in the southeast corner of the rear wing. It too is an open-well, open-string stairway and has a balustrade made to match that of the main stair (looks like a recent replacement). It begins its rise along the south wall to a landing, turns 90-degrees and continues along the east wall to a doorway to the back room on the second floor. It also descends into the basement.

3. Flooring: There is old, wide board flooring in the parlor and narrow wooden (replacement) flooring in the hall and dining room, and on the second floor. There is old, random-width flooring in the (ca. 1833) rear wing.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster, with pedestal chair rail just below the window in the first-

story rooms, including the stairhall, and in the east room on the second floor (no chair rail in the wing). There are wide baseboards with crown molding.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways are surrounded with stepped architrave trim on the first story, simple architrave trim on the second. The thick walls allow for panelled reveals, and the doors are six-panel.

b. Windows: The window surrounds are the same as the doorways. The windows are recessed.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are decorative Federal-style mantels in the main block. In the dining room, the opening of the fireplace is flanked by pilasters with a convex, fluted panel. Architrave molding separates it from the frieze above which consists of narrow fluting with a center panel of wider fluting. At either end of the frieze, above the pilasters, is a molded oval shell pattern. There is a molded mantel shelf above. There is a brick hearth. In the parlor, the mantel is similar. The difference is in the frieze which has narrow horizontal fluting with a center panel with a sunburst pattern. There is also dentil molding between the frieze and mantel shelf.

On the second floor the mantels are simpler. In the west bedroom, there is a plain frieze with a center panel with a cut-out oval design, and a narrow band of fluting below the shelf. There are simpler, fluted pilasters to either side. In the east bedroom, the frieze is again plain but with a fluted panel to the center, with dentilling below the shelf. The pilasters are fluted. In the rear wing, there is a fireplace against the rear wall on the first floor. It has a Greek Revival mantel with a plain frieze and panelled pilasters.

7. Hardware: There are old box locks and small, delicate brass door knobs on the doors.

8. Mechanical equipment: There is a well-fed air conditioning system in the basement. It was constructed in the late 1940s by the owner at that time, inventor Paul Shearer.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house sits on a knoll, facing south onto the terraced front lawn. There is a drop-off not far from the front of the house where steps lead down into the yard. To either side of the steps is a row of boxwood. The driveway (and approach) is from the east side, to the parking lot in the north rear.

2. Historic landscape design: The house sits atop a knoll with terracing to the front with a line of mature boxwood demarcating the narrow front yard from the terracing. The yard has numerous old oaks, maples and walnut trees. In the front yard to the west of the house is a champion dawn redwood.

3. Outbuildings: There are two historic outbuildings, located side-by-side to the southeast of the main house. One is Gabriel Duvall's Law Office and the other is a combination root cellar and ice house.

The law office is a small, one-and-a-half story, two-bay wide structure constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond. It has a gable roof covered with wooden shingles. There is a doorway and single six-over-six-light double-hung sash window, both with a flat arched brick lintel, at both the north front and south rear. There are no windows at the sides, with the exception of a single four-over-four-light double-hung sash window in the gable end of the west side. There is an interior chimney at the east gable end. It rests on a rubble stone foundation. Inside it is one large room. There is a boxed winder stair behind a narrow, three-panel wooden door held by HL hinges and a box lock, to the immediate east of the front entry. To the east wall, next to the boxed stair, is a closet, also with wood panel doors (two panels), HL hinges and box lock. Next to this is the fireplace with a plain architrave surround and simple mantel shelf. The windows and doorways have the same plain architrave trim. There are wide baseboards and beaded chair rail. The flooring is random width board. The west wall is covered with cupboards and shelving, a reproduction of Duvall's original law library shelves. There is a small loft room overhead.

The root cellar/ice house, now in a partially ruinous state, sits just west of the law office but just enough further south so that it is banked on the slope. Thus,

from the south it was entered from the foundation level where it is of rubble stone construction. The doorway is to the center with an arched brick lintel, above which the structure is constructed of brick laid in common bond. In the gable end above the doorway is a small window opening (window missing). There are also small window openings to either side. To the north rear, there was a large opening to the center. The roof is completely missing as are windows, doors and other fixtures.

PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: Marietta was photographed by HABS photographer John O. Brostrup on the 15th of April, 1936. Brostrup took two views, one general view from the south, of the front which includes the law office and root cellar/ice house, and the other from the northeast, of the side of the main block and the rear wing.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Pearl, Susan G. (P.G. Co. HPC) Maryland Historical Trust, State Historic Sites Inventory Form, Marietta, Prepared May 1988.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission, "Marietta; A Reflection of our Past, a Beacon for our Future" M-NCPPC, 1986 (Brochure).

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County; A Pictorial History (Prince George's County, Maryland: Donning Company Publishers, 1984).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of Marietta was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, began in January of 1989. The site selection was made by Gail Rothrock, director, and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, of the HPC. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of Prince George's County history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by historian Catherine C. Lavoie was also accompanied the photographer into the field for an on site investigation.